

Charitable
Institutions
In Colored Churches.

—BY—

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CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS

IN COLORED CHURCHES.*

I APPREHEND THAT THERE IS A COMMON RECOGNITION, in this "Ministers' Meeting," of the fact, that acts of mercy and organized benevolence are special functions of the religion of Christ. They stand, unless I make the greatest of mistakes, next in order to the confession of faith of the Lord Jesus. There can be no doubt, I judge, that mercifulness to the poor, the sick, the disabled, and the miserable run parallel, in the life of our blessed Lord, with all the announcements He made of the saving truth which He came into this world to announce to the sons of men.

He came, it is true, into this world to proclaim divine truth; but His mission was, as well, to see what were the pains and pangs of wretched human nature, and to exert a divine power capable of arresting the deadly tide of disease, in human frames and human homes. In accordance with this generous purpose He spent a life of most gracious restorative power; healing all manner of disease and sickness. He fed the hungry. He comforted the widow. He restored hearing to deafened ears. The blind, at His touch, were reclaimed from darkness to look forth, in joy, upon the brightness of clear skies and the lilies of the field. The paralyzed regained lost vital power to disabled limbs. The withered hand was made whole, and lunacy was changed to calm rationality and clear sense.

And these were to be perpetual characteristics of the Christian Faith, to the end of the world. Mercifulness was to be an unailing inheritance in the Christian system. The age of miracles has gone: but there is no distinct power and influence, the Lord once exerted, that has ever departed, entirely and in every way, from among men. We have still His personal presence in the world in His church; and so, likewise, the wondrous powers and

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the mighty energy He once wrought for the miserable sons of men, is still, and for aye, to be exerted for saving the bodies of humanity.

The evidence of the merciful action of our Lord is clear and distinct; for it is He who has broken the fetters from captive limbs; He who has freed the slave; He who, in multitudinous almshouses, asylums, infirmaries and hospitals, in every Christian land, has healed the bruises, sores and lacerations of men; given sight to the blind; hearing to deafened ears; made the lame to walk, and cured the dropsical and the paralytic.

2. Mercifulness then is an organic feature of the Christian religion. We see it everywhere, and from the earliest times, in every Christian Church. However much they may have departed from the lines of exact truth, yet the Christian instinct of benevolence has not been lost by any of them. Institutions for the curing of disease, for the care of the widow and the orphan, are seen in every Christian land, and in every organized form of Christianity. They characterize all the great Churches of Christendom. They have sprung up, during long centuries, in the Abyssinian, the Coptic, the Greek, the Roman and the Anglican Communions. And in England, Germany and America, since the Reformation, they are seen in the Lutheran, the Presbyterian, the Congregational and Methodist bodies, as prominent features of reformed religion, as of the older systems.

3. The religious systems of the black race in America are the most modern of any of the religious societies; and hence it is not a wonder that defective features are discernable in them. But, in order to the rectitude and perfection of these systems, it is a matter of vast importance, that these defective features should, first of all, be sought out; and then, rectified as soon as possible.

My impression is that the great defect of colored Christianity, in this country, is its lack of institutions and houses of mercy. If we confine ourselves to this immediate neighborhood, we shall, I think, light at once, upon this point of weakness.

There are, in the city of Washington, no less than 57 houses for the care of widows, orphans and diseased per-

sons. Very many of these have been created by distinct church societies, and are under their care and sustenance.

The colored people have over 70 churches and church organizations, and yet we have the saddening fact that these churches have failed, with hardly an exception, to care for their own poor, their widows, their diseased members, and their orphans. We build large churches; we are constantly dividing and sub-dividing our church organizations, and uprearing new and costly church edifices. Thousands and tens of thousands of dollars are constantly spent upon new church buildings; and poor people, in lanes and alleys, are almost exhausted, in meeting the demands for churches and chapels, which are almost annually erected, for splits and divisions; but never a dollar do we hear of, as expended for an orphanage, or a hospital, built by a colored church, for the needy and the destitute. There is, I learn, one Home for Colored Girls, on Erie street, Mrs. R. L. Waring, President; and as far as I can learn, no other of like kind; but this was not originated by any church, nor is it carried on under the auspices of any church,

4. Now all this, I maintain, is somewhat shameful. We are a population of 75,000 people. We have 72 church organizations; but mercifulness, an organic element in the religion of Jesus, and one of the most distinct features of the Holy Faith, is wanting in our Christianity. I am asked, perchance, the reasons for this indifference to works of charity in our churches.

I feel sensitively the delicacy of this query. At the same time I cannot doubt the duty and the necessity of exploring every province of a subject which pertains, so closely to the glory of Christ, the advancement of His kingdom, and to the piety of a new and advancing people.

Unless I happen to fall into one of the deepest of errors our delinquency, in the charitable movements of the age, is owing very considerably to the flavor of our piety. That piety I believe to be true and genuine; but I fear it is seriously defective in some of the essentials of spirituality.

5. I apprehend that any analysis of the religious character of the colored people in America will serve to show that

while strong, in demonstrative elements, and warm in emotional qualities, it divides off from the general piety of the Church of God, in those fine and tender qualities which generate the assiduities of grand philanthropy. We have indeed large "Beneficial Societies;" and we may be proud of these grand organizations which spread from town to town, from city to city, from state to state, and which serve to save individuals and families, in times of sore distress, from deep and utter want; and also to give relief and offer decency and propriety in the offices which pertain to the burial of the departed. But you will notice that the principle of commutation is well nigh as large an element in these institutions as is the benevolent. The matter of DEALING is no small feature in these organizations. It is an arrangement in which the idea and the fact of quid pro quo is a necessary contingent

No fault is to be found with this. Indeed it is wise, prudent, worthy and commendable. But what I maintain is that that large philanthropy in self-sacrificing endeavors for the miserable, is a lost factor in our church life. Where are the Sisters of Mercy? Where the devoted brotherhoods? Where the unostentatious gifts and legacies which build up noble houses for the destitute, for the blind, for the orphan, for the widow?

6. This feature of Christianity is yet to be produced. We have got to get down to the fineness of Christian sensibility, to the gracious sweetness of Christian love before we shall see such fruits of righteousness in our churches. We have got to emerge from the coarseness and the rudeness which characterize the first passage of a people into the Christian system; and to enter into that more advanced stage of the Christian life which yields the primal qualities of the martyr life.

7. But now the question arises—What is the remedy for this notable defect? Let me suggest a simple outline of Christian duty :

(a) And first of all, let me say that, whatever we do, let it be distinctively Christian. Diffusiveness, I beg to say, means defeat. If we take ignorant and weak men, women, and especially children, under our care, they must be taught a Christianity with bones and muscles. No

jelly-fish Christianity will suffice for any weak soul; it will not serve to make a robust Christian man or woman. People to be trained up as Christians, must have something definite to believe.

(b) Hence it seems to me that any and every merciful institution should be Christian. It should not be a theological institution, but it should show forth Jesus Christ, clearly and distinctly, as Prophet, Priest and King, the great God-Man, who came to save the souls and bodies alike of human beings.

(c) Such institutions then should be under the care of the Churches; churches not afraid to inculcate definitely in prayers and exercises, and the observance of the Christian Sunday, and the two Sacraments; and, in the case of orphans, definite Christian catechising.

8. It is, without doubt, a duty to make a beginning in the work of organized charity. If we do not, our religion will soon run to seed. What is our professed faith? What our asseverations of Christian love? What our blatant declarations of assured hope, if there is none of the fruitage of noble, loving works for the good of man and for the glory of God? if their largest outcome is but bricks and mortar? What will an observant world characterize it but pious platitudes, or rhapsodical religiosity?

The plea which perchance may arise, in many quarters, is that of poverty.

The large and stately church edifices in every state and city, erected by our people, negatives the plea. Poor as we are as a people, we are rich in picnics, parades, excursions, church entertainments, and the upbuilding of temples. Now let some of this zeal and expenditure run in the channel of benevolence.

And be it noticed there is nothing formidable and unattainable in such a venture as this. While indeed large and extensive establishments, are needed, for the large population which we make in the large centres; yet we must not despise the day of small beginnings. All institutions of mercy began on a small scale. So should ours be. But a beginning should be made, and a beginning CAN be made in a simple and almost inexpensive manner.

Let a suite of rooms, at a moderate rent, be the beginning; under the care of a matron, and a board of managers carefully selected; managers of piety, philanthropy and business capacity. Such an undertaking need not cost over \$600 or \$800 a year.

I know an undertaking, carried on some 20 years, which has cost, on an average, about \$800 a year; and cared for a $\frac{1}{2}$ dozen aged and infirm women, annually. And now, it has a building fund of \$3,000, and is looking forward to an establishment. Here in Washington, on the outskirts of the city a small Home could easily be secured for the support of a dozen women or orphans; and the building could not cost over \$3,000 or \$4,000.

In order to carry out these ends, I think each organized Christian body in the District should endeavor to establish—

- (1) Orphanages for children.
- (2) Homes for helpless Christian widows—members of the churches.
- (3) Hospitals for the sick.
- (4) Home for friendless girls, out of work, or cast upon the city.

The Methodist Churches of this city might, unitedly, undertake one or two of such efforts. So might the Baptist. Our Congregational and Presbyterian brethren, might, unitedly, do the same. The effort might be plain and simple, at the beginning: a small house might, at first, be hired, or be built; afterward enlarged, and so the foundation be laid for a future movement of large proportions. The people should be called upon to aid in the effort by contributions; and the sick and dying exhorted to give legacies for the endowment of the same. And thus, and in other divers ways, we could begin, as other Christian people have done in all Christian ages, to carry on the divine command of the Lord Jesus, to give meat to the hungry and drink to the thirsty; to take in the stranger; to clothe the naked; to visit the sick; to call upon the prisoner.

“Blessed be the man that provideth for the sick and the needy; the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble.”

